



AFRICAN VIOLETS

The African violet is probably the most popular flowering house plant of all time. They're small, easy to grow, bloom frequently, come in an amazing variety of colors, are easy to propagate, and are available any time of year.

BASIC CARE

Ideally, TEMPERATURES should be 65-70°F at night, slightly warmer during the day. If temperatures are too low, the leaves will droop and curl, or the plant may collapse completely. Excessive heat can cause thin, spindly growth, dry shriveled leaves, or, again, collapse of the plant.

African violets like direct morning or late afternoon sunlight, very bright indirect LIGHT, or fluorescent or grow lights. Avoid direct midday sun that can cause brown spots on leaves. Excessively high light levels can cause overly compact growth, while lower light levels causes plants to grow very long leaf stems and to grow upright instead of flat and round. Rotate plants 1/4 turn weekly to maintain symmetrical growth (unnecessary if light source is directly overhead). Fluorescent and grow lights should be no more than 18" above the plant, lower when growing miniatures.

Apply room temperature WATER when surface soil is dry to the touch. Most violet growers prefer to bottom-water; however, watering from the top is fine if you are careful to avoid cool water on the leaves. Always make sure leaves are dry before exposing them to any direct sunlight. Bottom watering works best if done with wicking or with a "self-watering" pot. If you choose to set the pot in a saucer of water, discard any water not drawn into the root ball within 15 to 30 minutes.

Whether you top or bottom water, you should occasionally leach the soil by running water through it for several minutes—this will remove any salts that may have accumulated from tap water or fertilizers. Over-watering is the most common way that people kill their African violets. Leaf or flower loss, limp plants, and crown and stem rot are all results of too much water. Insufficient watering causes roots to shrivel and die, the plant to lose vigor and color, and then collapse.

African violets tolerate average indoor HUMIDITY; 40-60% is best. If your house is very dry, mist your violets lightly with room temperature water on a daily basis, but *never* late in the day or at night. Another way to combat dry air is to place your violets on a tray filled with pebbles, keeping water in the tray at a level just below the surface of the pebbles.

Apply a dilute balanced FERTILIZER each time you water. Most African violets are grown in soilless potting mixes, and require constant feeding. Unless the fertilizer is specifically designed for use with every watering, be careful to dilute the fertilizer more than the amount recommended on the label (usually 1/4 strength will do). Without regular feeding, violets will not flower well. Too much fertilizer can burn the plant, causing brown tips and leaf edges. Most violet fertilizers have a formula high in phosphorus (P), the middle number of the three numbers on the label (e.g., 15-30-15).

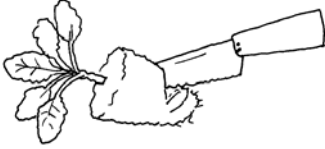
GROOM your African violets by removing spent flowers and dead leaves. Wash leaves occasionally with slightly warm water, blotting dry. Violets have hairy leaves that will collect dust. A soft brush can be used to keep leaves clean between baths. Removing suckers—plantlets—will maintain your violets symmetrical shape.

Check for PESTS and DISEASE regularly. African violets are prone to powdery mildew, a fungus that looks like fine white talcum powder on leaves and flowers. Good air circulation around plants may help prevent this problem. Mealybug and thrips are two insects that commonly attack violets. Mealybug appears as white, cottony patches on leaves (top or bottom) and stems. Thrips signal their presence by causing brown edges on flowers, distorted leaves, and pollen trails on petals. Isolate any infested plants, and treat as needed. Proper care of your violets will result in healthy plants which are less susceptible to pest and disease.

PROPAGATION is usually by leaf cuttings. Remove a healthy leaf, and cut its stem to about 1/2 inch. Insert the stem into damp cutting mix and maintain higher humidity. New plants form at the base of the leaf. You can also root the leaf in water, and violets can also be grown from seed.

MAINTENANCE

REPOT your violet once or twice a year to maintain its appearance and provide fresh growing medium. As African violets grow, they lose the older, lower leaves. This process causes a bare stem to form—called the “neck”—which is unsightly, and makes the plant more vulnerable to disease. Repotting will enable you to keep the attractive, rosette growing habit that a newly purchased violet has.



If your violet has not developed a very long neck, remove it from the pot, and cut off a slice of soil from the bottom of the root ball that is roughly equal to the length of the neck. Set the plant back into its pot, and add fresh medium to the top of the root ball, covering the bare neck. New roots will grow out into the medium from the neck.

For a plant that has been allowed to grow a long, curving neck, it is best to cut the stem and root the leafy part of the plant. This short stem can then be pressed into fresh potting medium, where it will grow a new root system. Keep the potting medium moist, but not soggy, until new growth signals the development of healthy new roots.



NOTE that trailing violets do not maintain a symmetrical rosette shape, and should be allowed to sucker and trail freely. If a trailer loses too many leaves and becomes unattractive, it can be pruned, and new plants started from the stem cuttings. Miniature violets tend to sucker freely, and are still attractive when allowed to spread in the pot.

Do not over-pot your violets. Standard African violets are happy in a 4” diameter pot, with regular repottings to control the neck length. Miniature violets do best in a 3” pot. Violets need to be slightly pot-bound to bloom. Repotting while in bud or bloom may cause the flowers to drop off or fade quickly, as even careful transplanting puts stress on the root system.